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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 002485

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PARM](#) [KU](#) [IR](#) [NATIONAL ASSEMBLY KUWAIT](#) [IRAN RELATIONS](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CRITICIZED FOR REITERATING U.S.

POSITION ON IRAN

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary and Comment: Led by National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi, a few Kuwaiti political figures have criticized the Ambassador's May 25 speech to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense Command and Staff College. The public release of the speech, in which the Ambassador reiterated U.S. concern that Iran's pursuit of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction was a threat to regional security, coincided with the visit to Kuwait of Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Mohammed Reza Asefi, and was seen by some Kuwaitis as inflammatory. The criticism also coincides with the downgrading of Kuwait's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) rank and placement on the USTR's Special 301 Priority Watchlist, decisions that have not been well received by the GOK or the public. The Ambassador's remarks hewed closely to official USG policy and are of no substantive surprise to the GOK. It is likely that the criticism by Speaker Khorafi is meant as much to placate the Government of Iran as to chastise the U.S. The Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tehran told Poloff June 5 (septel) that the GOK is "very, very concerned" about possible Iranian nuclear weapon development. In addition, the timing of the speech, corresponding with two announcements widely seen as critical of Kuwait and the visit of an Iranian official, has no doubt added to any sense of injury felt by the GOK or its citizens. The remarks by the Ambassador can be found at <http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/may 25 2005.html>. End Comment and Summary.

2. (SBU) Speaking to local dailies on June 4, National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi characterized the Ambassador's May 25 speech to the Kuwait Ministry of Defense Command and Staff College as "interference" in Kuwait's bilateral relationship with Iran. Bemoaning the Defense Ministry's invitation to the U.S. Ambassador to speak to graduating students -- an annual occurrence -- the Speaker said others "should not interfere in our affairs and should not transfer their conflicts with other countries to Kuwait." The Speaker's remarks came after Defense Minister Shaykh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah's June 2 statement to local dailies that the Ambassador's remarks did not reflect the views of the Defense Ministry. The speech, referencing POTUS' February 2 State of the Union address, had called upon Iran to "give up its uranium enrichment program, and any plutonium reprocessing, and end its support of terror."

3. (C) Visiting Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tehran, Majed Al-Difiri (strictly protect), told Poloff and PolMiloff June 4 that the decision to allow the printing of the Ambassador's speech in local dailies during Asefi's visit was a mistake, and unnecessarily aggravated the GOK, although the message may have been appropriate for the audience to which it was originally given. He said that the GOK was concerned that the United States not involve it in its disagreements with Iran. In a conversation with Poloff and PolMiloff on June 5, Sayed Mohammed Bager Al-Mohri, head of Kuwait's Shiite Clerics Congregation, concurred. Al-Mohri said Kuwait is a "small and weak state" whose international relations strategy involves delicately balancing its national security interests, and it could not afford to become a front line in the U.S.-Iranian conflict.

4. (U) The Chairman of the National Assembly's Foreign Relations Committee, outspoken reformer Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager, defended the Ambassador's remarks during a June 5 press conference. Al-Sager said the Ambassador's comments reflect the views of the U.S. government and thus cannot be interpreted as interference in Kuwait's affairs.

5. (SBU) The criticism of the Ambassador's remarks followed closely the June 3 announcement that Kuwait and other Gulf allies were ranked as Tier 3 countries in the Department's 2005 TIP report, as well as the April 29 re-listing of Kuwait on the USTR's 301 Priority Watch List for IPR infringements. Both announcements and the speech earned criticism from local English daily The Kuwait Times, which published a June 5 article entitled: "With Friends Like These: US policies aggravate relations with Kuwait."

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